

### Michelle Parks

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In 1902, the original Tempe settlers sat down together for a picnic on the Peterson lawn on West Southern Avenue and South Priest Drive.

This Saturday, more than 200 longtime Tempeans reunited for the 101st Annual Old Settlers Picnic at Arizona Community Church.

Today, there are about 400 members of the Tempe Old Settlers Association, board member Doug Royse said. To be considered a member of the Tempe Old Settlers Association, citizens must have been a resident of Tempe for at least 30 years.

Each year since 1902, excluding some years during both world wars, the longtime residents have met for a picnic to get reacquainted with each other and reminisce about the past.

The event was less like a group of community members and more like a large family reunion. Residents hugged and kissed each other as they caught up, constantly being interrupted to greet another longtime friend.

Congressman Harry Mitchell, who has been a Tempe resident since 1946, said he saw many former students, parents, neighbors and classmates as he looked around the room.

"It becomes more like a class or family reunion," Mitchell said as he greeted a constant stream of people at the end of a food line.

A prize was given to the oldest man and woman in attendance.

"This is the one place everyone is proud to be old," Royse said. Dick McQueen, 93, won the prize for the oldest man.

McQueen said he brought his family to Tempe in 1953 to fix his sons' respiratory problems but stayed because of the community.

"It's special to us. It was a small town when we moved here," McQueen said. "We gained a lot of friends and neighbors, it was easy to make friends."

His son Jerry McQueen was also in attendance and said he believed younger generations need to continue the traditions of former generations of Tempe residents.

"My dad made me come," 67-year-old Jerry McQueen joked. "My generation has to pick up the tradition. When I first started they were all old people. Now I've joined them."

Guy Davidson, a pastor at the community church where the event was held, gave a brief speech and encouraged residents to remember the past and the history of Tempe.

"We can be trapped by history or be inspired by it," he said. "I think we're still inspired by it."

Sharon Lara, 67, who was born in Tempe, attributed the city's success in retaining residents to its collective sense of caring.

"The community in Tempe has always stuck together," she said. "It's a great place to be neighbors."

Tempe Old Settlers board member Arlene Chin, 44, said Tempe has retained its small-town feel despite substantial growth in recent years.

"One of the values of Tempeans is community," she said. "This community values community."

As she checked members into the event, Chin said she was amazed at the stories she heard in response to asking what year the person came to Tempe.

"If you look around at some of the nametags, you see there are schools, streets and stadiums named for these people," she said.

The group also elected its new association officials at the event.

Board members Drew Metcalf and Joe Spracle will replace Joel Navarro and Jerry Hall as the association's president and vice president, respectively.

City councilman Joel Navarro said he took on the role as president as a way to help preserve Tempe traditions for future generations, including his children who currently reside in Tempe.

"It's a great way to learn history, and keep the stories going and pass them on," he said.

Board member and Tempe resident since 1950 Marguerite Clark said she chose to be involved with the event because of the joy it brings to residents

"It's rewarding to see the people you grew up with," she said. "It comes with growing older - it's an appreciation for those around you and of life."